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Admiral Tromp and AEMILIA, compiled by A. Palmhof

AEMILIA (frigate)

Antigua and Barbuda #1970D (1996) 45c S/S, #1971a (1996) \$1.20

1636 – Admiralty of the Maze, Rotterdam, Netherlands; Rotterdam, Netherlands; Tonnage around 600 tons; 132' x 32'; 46 guns when built, later under command of Tromp with a armament of 4 - 36pdrs., 11 - 24 pdrs., 12 - 18 pdrs., 21 - 12 pdrs., 9 - 6 pdrs; Crew: 180 - 240 men.

The **AEMILIA** was built in 1636 at Rotterdam, for the Admiralty of the Maze, as a frigate, with two decks. She was the first Dutch warship with two decks, built with large provision and powder rooms, to keep her for a long time at sea. She was special built for convoy or blockade duty in the English Channel and North Sea. She was the flagship of Lt. Admiral Philips van Dorp, but when he was dismissed in 1637, Lt. Admiral Maerten Harpertz Tromp [Netherlands #254 (1943/44) 12_c] got the **AEMILIA** as his flagship. The Capt. of the **AEMILIA** for a long time was, Barend Barendsz Cramers. In 1637, the Dutch merchant fleet consisted of 1,750 vessels, and around 600 fishing vessel, a total which could never be protected sufficiently. The Dutch navy was small, and the money needed to build new ships was not available. As well, there was trouble between the five Admiralties of the Seven Provinces (the name at that time for the Netherlands) which delayed new buildings. Because of political trouble or war the Dutch government chartered many merchant ships, and quickly refitted the vessels as warships. When Tromp got the **AEMILIA** as his flagship, the Seven Provinces were still in war with Spain (80 year war). The south part of the Netherlands (now Belgium) was still in the hands of the Spanish King. In that time, Spain was also in war with France, and to send relief troops from Spain to his possessions in the North, the sea-roads had to be used. Dunkirk, at that time belonged to Flanders, and was the main landing port for the

troops. It also was a large pirate base. The main task for Tromp was to protect the Dutch shipping lanes, and blockade the port of Dunkirk. In Nov. 1637, he expected the Spanish fleet. With relief troops and money to pay the wages of the soldiers, he sailed out on board the **AEMILIA** with his squadron of 12 warships. Taking position off the Lizard in the English Channel, due to bad weather, he drifted to a position between Portland and the Casquets on Dec. 9. On Dec. 23, he received a report that

the Spanish fleet, with 38 ships, 5,000 soldiers, and a large cargo of silver, had sneaked along his squadron on the dark night of Dec. 11/12, and safely arrived at Dunkirk. Tromp, afraid of privateers from Dunkirk, and strengthened with the newly arrived ships, harassed the Dutch merchant and fishing fleets, staying out in the English Channel until March 1638 before returning to Hellevoetsluis.

In May, he was at sea again with the **AEMILIA**, and with his squadron, blockaded Dunkirk until October. When in early 1639 the Government of the Seven Provinces received reports that a large fleet

of Spanish/ Portuguese, with troops and money for the garrisons in Flanders, would sail out. Tromp on board the **AEMILIA** sailed out with 12 warships in the middle of Jan., and his squadron took position in the waters off Dunkirk. A strong fleet under command of Miguel de Orna

tried to break out of the port. But after a battle of four hours, it was driven back, with the loss of two ships. Orna's flagship was grounded, and to keep it out of the hands of the Dutch, he burned it. Tromp's squadron also received a battering, and had to sail to Hellevoetsluis for repairs. When the Dutch fleet was under repair, the Dunkirk ships got orders to sail out, and on March 12, 18 ships with 2,000 soldiers left

Dunkirk bound for Spain.

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(Admiral Tromp and AEMILIA, cont. from page 57)

After repairs were completed at the end of April, Tromp sailed out with his squadron of 20 ships, and took up position between Portland and the Casquets. On Sept. 6, the Spanish/Portuguese Armada set sail from La Coruna, with a fleet of 70 ships, of which 45 were warships and 30 transport vessels. They were under command of General (not Admiral) Don Antonio d'Oquendo on board the



SANTIAGO, a galleon of 1,600 tons, 60 guns and a crew of about 1,000 men. The largest ship in the fleet was the Portuguese galleon **SANTA TERESA** [Mozambique #445 (1963) 4e50] under command of Don Lope de Hoces Y Cordoba. The fleet total armament was over 1,700 guns and 20,000 men.

On Sept. 15, at 07.00 a.m. the Spanish-Portuguese fleet was sighted by Tromp's squadron. At the time,

Tromp only had 13 ships with 399 guns and 1,425 men. He ordered Capt. Tjaert de Groot with his ship, the **FRIESLANT**, to sail at once to the two other Dutch squadrons at sea with orders to join his squadron. The next morning Lt. Admiral Witte de Wit, [Netherlands #257 (1943/44) 20c], who blockaded Dunkirk with five ships, joined Tromp's squadron. That morning, the battle began, which was heavy.

At last, d'Oquendo withdrew from the battle. Tromp lost one vessel, the **GROOTE CHRISTOFFEL**, under command of Capt. Frederik Pietersz with 28 guns and 90 men. The vessel was blown up by her own powder with all crew lost except one. That night Tromp kept in contact with the enemy, and the next morning, due to fog and no wind, not much action took place. Both fleets drifted slowly with the tides.



But as the wind increased, by nightfall, the battle had started again. Tromp with his fleet tried to block the passage for the Spanish/Portuguese fleet to Dunkirk, and by morning, the most welcome reinforcement arrived. Lt. Admiral Banckarts, who protected the Dutch fishing fleets on the North Sea, joined with 12 ships. Tromp's fleet was now 30 ships with a total of 846 guns and 3,260 men. On Sept. 18, d'Oquendo, with his fleet passed Dover, realized that trying to escape to Dunkirk was impossible. The large Spanish/Portuguese fleet got a heavy battering from the Dutch fleet, and the only escape for d'Oquendo was the neutral English coast. England was at that time, not in war with Spain, and d'Oquendo expected help from the

English fleet. He sailed to Duins (the Downs) and the fleet dropped anchor inside the English waters.

Tromp, who stayed outside, put up a blockade and waited for the ships to come out. Day after day the Dutch fleet received reinforcement from the nearby Dutch coast. The Spanish/Portuguese fleet at anchor did not make many preparations to sail out from the Downs, and Tromp became impatient. He was also afraid that the English squadron, under command of Vice-Admiral Penington, who was watching both fleets, would send reinforcements of other ships of the English navy.

Once Tromp's fleet increased to 96 ships and 11 fire-ships, he didn't want to wait longer. He hoped the English squadron would stay out of the battle, but to be sure, he ordered Witte de With with 30 ships, to take a position between him and the English fleet. And if the English fleet attacked, de With had orders to attack and destroy the English squadron.

But the English squadron stayed out of the battle.

On Oct. 21, at 08.30, Tromp fired the first shot from the **AEMILIA**. The Spanish/Portuguese fleet cut the anchor cables, and around 20 vessels, in panic, grounded on the English coast. The crews jumped overboard to save their lives. Then fog drifted in, and for a half hour, both fleets couldn't see each other. But when the fog lifted, Tromp sent in his fire-ships. One of the grounded vessels was the flagship of Admiral Castro, the **SAN ANTONIO**, which caught fire and sank. After an hour-long battle, one-third of the Spanish/Portuguese fleet had been set on fire, destroyed or grounded. The flagship **SANTIAGO** and the **SANTA TERESA**, with some vessels from Dunkirk, sailed off, chased by the Dutch fleet.

The **SANTA TERESA** attracted much Dutch fire from all sides. When her bowsprit got entangled in the stern gallery of a Dutch vessel under command of Captain Musch, the vessel lost speed and the Dutch fire-ships got a change to attack. Capt. Musch's vessel caught fire and sank slowly, but most of the crew was saved. The **SANTA TERESA** then caught fire, and most of the crew was burnt or jumped overboard and drowned. At least 600 crew of that ship were lost.

Around 07.00 p.m. a great flash, like lighting, was seen from the coast. According to an old English record, it was the Portuguese admiral's powder on the burning ship, blowing up.

The **SANTIAGO** escaped, severely damaged, but arrived at Dunkirk. Only by constantly pumping the vessel, was she able to be kept afloat. Afterwards 1,700 gunholes were counted in her hull.

Only nine vessels reached Dunkirk, the remainder of the Spanish/Portuguese were destroyed or grounded on the English coast and 14 vessels were taken by the Dutch as a prize. Of the grounded vessels, nine were later saved by the Spanish, one was the **SAN ANTONIO**. The Dutch fleet lost only one ship (Musch's) and 100 men. The Spanish/Portuguese fleet lost 7,000 men, and 1,800 were taken prisoner by the Dutch.

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